

To: Stanislaus, Mathy[Stanislaus.Mathy@epa.gov]; Breen, Barry[Breen.Barry@epa.gov]
From: Brooks, Becky
Sent: Thur 2/27/2014 1:08:26 PM
Subject: Feb. 20 Whitman Op Ed

I made a hard copy of this and some other clips for you both. Becky

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2014/02/20/christine-todd-whitman-chemicals/5612695/>

Whitman: How to improve chemical plant safety

Christine Todd Whitman 7:41 a.m. EST February 20, 2014

U.S. can reduce dangers by requiring use of safer technology and chemicals.



Firefighters conduct search and rescue of an apartment destroyed by an explosion at a fertilizer plant in West, Texas, on April 18. (Photo: LM Otero, AP)

Story Highlights

- Too many Americans think that major accidents cannot happen in their community.
- But as EPA administrator I studied ways to reduce the vulnerability of our chemical plants.
- The means are there if we act -- and soon.

SHARE 93 CONNECT 35 TWEET 1 COMMENT EMAIL MORE

On Aug. 6, 2012, when a pipe ruptured at an oil refinery in Richmond, Calif., releasing a vapor cloud that sent 15,000 people from the surrounding area to seek medical treatment, most people probably thought, "I'm relieved that cannot happen in my community."

Last year, when a fertilizer plant in West Texas exploded, killing 15 people, injuring hundreds more, and leveling a large portion of the community, most people probably thought, "I'm glad that couldn't happen where I live."

And last month, when a chemical spill in West Virginia left 300,000 people without drinking water, most people probably thought, "Well, that couldn't happen here."

If you're reading this, you might think such a disaster could not happen where you live. You would probably be wrong.

Today, more than 100 million Americans live close enough to one of the more than 470 chemical facilities across the country that could put 100,000 people at risk if there were a deliberate or accidental release of chemicals at those sites.

It is time — indeed, it is past time — to reduce the vulnerability of our nation's chemical industry infrastructure (and the danger to the people who live nearby) by requiring them to use inherently safer technologies and chemicals when such chemicals and processes are effective, affordable and available.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, one of my top priorities as the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was to reduce the vulnerability of America's chemical infrastructure to terrorist attack.

I received classified briefings on the potential consequences of a successful attack on a chemical facility -- and the methods by which it could be carried out -- making me determined to tackle this glaring vulnerability.

Working with other federal partners -- including the White House Office of Homeland Security — EPA drafted legislation that would have required those chemical facilities that posed the greatest risk to evaluate whether they could reduce their vulnerability to deliberate attack by switching to safer chemicals and processes, and to make the switch if feasible.

Making the change to inherently safer technology would have made them less attractive targets to terrorists bent on causing mass casualties and disrupting America's economy. Unfortunately, the White House ultimately declined to send our draft legislation to the Congress for its consideration.

More than a decade has passed since our effort at the EPA came up short. But now, for the first time in years, there may be some progress. Last year, following the disaster in Texas, President Obama issued an executive order directing federal agencies, including EPA, to address the ongoing risks certain chemical facilities continue to pose.

The best step that EPA could take would be to use the authority it already has under the Clean Air Act to issue regulations requiring the use of inherently safer technology when available, effective, and affordable.

This authority was available 10 years ago. At the time, however, we thought the best approach was to enact a law specifically addressing the matter. As some will remember, Congress passed any number of homeland security measures. I believe that there was a very good chance the legislation we drafted back in 2002-03 would also have been enacted had the White House decided to introduce it.

Today, of course, the legislative climate is different. That is why I believe that the best path forward is for EPA to issue the regulations needed to reduce the risk to our people and our economy, rather than seek a legislative solution.

Both President Obama and Vice President Biden supported the use of inherently safer technology during their Senate careers and as candidates for the White House. I urge the president to give the EPA the green light to take the steps it has the authority to take to safeguard the American people from the risk of both accidental and deliberate releases of toxic chemicals in sufficient quantities to cause real harm.

After West Virginia, Texas, California, and others, what more will it take to get this done?

Christine Todd Whitman served as administrator of the EPA under President George W. Bush and is a former governor of New Jersey.